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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CHIANG MAI 000216

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: NORTHERN ASSIGNMENTS SHOW STRONG HAND OF THAKSIN

REF: BANGKOK 5964

CHIANG MAI 00000216 001.2 OF 002

11. (sbu) Summary. October 1 brought the annual promotions and reassignments of officials in Northern Thailand, as well as the rest of the country (reftel). Although civil service, police, and military promotions are officially based on seniority and merit, politics played perhaps an even stronger role than usual this year. end summary

It's not easy being Chiang Mai Governor under Thaksin

12. (sbu) In the annual reshuffle of governors and military officers that became effective October 1, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra showed

13. (sbu) The Prime Minister has made his home town of Chiang Mai a priority development area, lavishing funds on projects such as the Night Prime Minister's high expectations. Suwat has faced criticism over growing youth problems, an issue that the PM is starting to bring to the fore nationwide. In particular the Governor is on the line for failing to restrict licenses for places serving alcoholic drinks, which are blamed for contributing to the corruption of young people. Governor Suwat also had to publicly disassociate himself from a company owned by his daughter that was awarded a Provincial Government-supervised bid to organize an IT fa

14. (sbu) Perhaps most crucially, Governor Suwat was held responsible for the poor governmental response to severe flooding that hit Chiang Mai August 14-15. When a second flood September 20 threatened to disrupt high-level Thai-Chinese trade talks, the Prime Minister sent Deputy Interior Minister Sermsak Pongpanit to direct relief and recovery. When flooding hit a third time September 30, Thaksin dispatched Deputy Prime Minister Suwat Liptapanlop to supervise the work of the provincial and

15. (sbu) In the end, however, Governor Suwat was saved in this round by his helpful role in the Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party's sweep of all ter

A little help from the police goes a long way

16. (sbu) Region 5 Police Commissioner Pol Lt Gen Panupong Singhara Na Ayudhya was also passed over for promotion, reportedly because of his s remain in the north until public attention has faded. In this way Thaksin can protect Panupong, who reportedly helped ensure the TRT victory in February by using police to stop rival canvassers.

17. (sbu) In another example of the old boys network at work, Thaksin's former police academy classmate Border Patrol Police (BPP) Region 3 chief Pol Maj Gen Suradet Saengpradit retained his position despite a lackluster performance in the counter-narcotics area. Su

Military tensions over Burma

18. (sbu) Strong speculation that Lt Gen Saprang Kalanamit would be passed over as 3rd army chief in favor of the more junior Maj Gen Manat F Ayudhya. However, Saprang's tenure is considered insecure because of his hardline approach to Burma, which is not compatible with his predecessor Gen Pichanmet's joint border development initiative or Thaksin's classmate Maj Gen Manat Paorik, earlier thought to have a shot at the 3d Army command job, is now positioned as the most senior among

19. (sbu) Comment: Although Thaksin apparently made some

CHIANG MAI 00000216 002.2 OF 002

compromises with military concerns over politicizing the promotion list, our contacts from the Ministry of Interior and the 3rd Army had no trc and nepotism prevailed. To no one's surprise, the advantage went to those with personal, business and/or political connections with the Prime Minister, his family, and key party members.